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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001880

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR  
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WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [HA](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS LES CAYES

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1753

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: Ambassador traveled November 14 and 15 to the South Department's capital city, Les Cayes, accompanied by DepDir USAID and Emboffs. Haiti's 'southern claw' is still recovering from flooding caused by Tropical Storm Noel and its aftermath. Les Cayes thus far has been spared significant security threats and violence, but like the rest of the country faces gaping deficits in infrastructure, economic opportunity, health care and education. It is struggling to cope with continuing rural-to-urban migration. Discontent over lack of basic services occasionally erupts in public protest. In addition to these problems that plague most of Haiti, this region faces deeply entrenched drug trafficking networks that have infiltrated local police ranks and defied MINUSTAH efforts to uproot them. The MINUSTAH battalion based in Les Cayes focuses on combating drug trafficking and assisting with civil affairs and humanitarian projects. The newly elected mayor of Les Cayes laments the city's poor infrastructure and the local government's inability to properly fulfill its role due to lack of resources. USAID projects in micro-finance, education, HIV/AIDS and small infrastructure are bringing visible improvements to the region, the effects of which Emboffs witnessed at the individual level. End summary.

MINUSTAH Emphasizes Drug Trafficking Problem

¶2. (C) Les Cayes serves as the base for one of MINUSTAH's two Uruguayan battalions (URUBAT I). URUBAT I Commander Colonel Angel Cedres reported that the situation in the south is 'mostly calm' but over the last month small groups have publicly protested and sabotaged roadways. Capabilities of the local Haitian National Police (HNP) force are low, and it is considered highly corrupt. (Note: One HNP officer noted to Ambassador that some officers in his own organization are aiding drug traffickers. End note.) The HNP is grossly understaffed, with 243 officers and 26 specially trained riot police for the entire South Department. Local prisons are

severely overcrowded and in poor condition, as are government buildings. The justice system is dysfunctional, with only 19 percent of those arrested reaching trial. Colonel Cedras said GOH institutions - including the justice, health care, security and education sectors - are empty shells, making it difficult to provide stability.

13. (C) Narco-trafficking is the south's biggest problem, particularly around the town of St. Louis du Sud, according to Colonel Cedras. He had recently requested permission from MINUSTAH Force Commander General Dos Santos Cruz to destroy several clandestine landing strips, but as of November 14 had not yet received authorization. Colonel Cedras noted that although his troops are making every effort to combat illegal trafficking, the drug runners often receive tips that MINUSTAH is en route and quickly disappear. He specifically mentioned that the presence of Guy Philippe's family in Les Cayes posed difficulties for URUBAT I, and that Philippe's local popularity makes it difficult to develop information on his whereabouts. Ambassador assured Cedras that the USG shares his concerns about narco-trafficking and is working closely with the GOH to combat this problem. She also noted the Embassy is discussing possible methods of coordination with MINUSTAH headquarters in Port-au-Prince.

14. (U) URUBAT I also assists in implementation of MINUSTAH quick impact projects (QIPs), in large part providing humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of hurricanes and floods. MINUSTAH records cite 3951 evacuees from the most recent flooding (reftel), to whom they provided medical assistance, food and transportation. Colonel Cedras said MINUSTAH tries to involve local authorities in the process, but their attempts often fail because of lack of interest or response from those officials.

New Mayor Lacks Resources

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15. (U) Les Cayes Mayor Yvon Chery and his two deputy mayors, Jean Mariot Altenor and Mona Hector Herve, met November 14 with Ambassador in the Mayor's office. (Note: The three-member cartel from the ''Union'' party won a run-off election in April. End Note.) Echoing MINUSTAH, Chery said Les Cayes is one of the safest areas in Haiti and has no major security problems, even though the local HNP has few resources and patrols infrequently. He claimed drug trafficking is no longer a problem in Les Cayes now that MINUSTAH patrols regularly. Chery said the most pressing needs are a bus station, a new market to get merchants off the streets and into a legitimate venue, and rehabilitation of tourist beaches damaged in recent storms. (Note: Les Cayes serves as a transit point for visitors to several popular tourist resorts, including Ile-a-Vache and Port Salut. End note.) He admitted there have been some public protests lately and explained that this is the citizens' way of pressuring state authorities to provide more electricity and other services. Normally elections are the only source of social friction, according to the mayor. The construction industry is the largest employer in the city, followed by commerce and light industry. Unemployment nevertheless remains very high.

16. (U) The city is vulnerable to hurricanes and flooding, and the population of 149,000 is growing rapidly as people move to the city from the surrounding countryside. According to Deputy Mayor Herve, recent floods damaged roads and houses, affecting approximately 20,000 families. Representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Les Cayes following Tropical Storm Noel to assess the damage. Though he claimed a close relationship with the Ministry of Interior, Chery lamented the very limited means made available to local governments. The mayor repeatedly thanked the Ambassador for the work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), one of

USAID's implementing partners, especially in Les Cayes' less favorable neighborhoods.

USAID Projects Making an Impact

17. (U) Ambassador had an opportunity to witness several USAID projects in action. FINCA Haiti (Foundation for International Community Assistance) provides small loans to entrepreneurs through its 'village banking' model. FINCA Haiti has over 13,000 active clients, 98 percent of which are women. Ambassador spoke with several satisfied clients who said the loan had revolutionized their businesses, including a group of women who established a string of successful beachfront cafes. At 'Pwoje Espwa' (Project Hope), an orphanage for over 600 children, Ambassador was treated to a cultural performance by the children, who all attend school and receive three meals a day, in part through PL 480 commodities supplied through USAID's partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS). At Lycee Philippe Guerrier, IOM recently renovated several classrooms, replaced the roof and upgraded the electrical system. The school has over 2300 students from some of the poorest families in Les Cayes and is one of the oldest public high schools in Haiti. The local IOM representative reported great success involving locals in such rehabilitation projects, with citizens truly investing themselves in the improvement of their own communities.

18. (U) Ambassador also inaugurated the 'People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Transit House' in Les Cayes. The Transit House provides short-term housing for individuals in the Les Cayes region who have tested HIV-positive and need a place to stay while receiving care at a nearby hospital. Directors of the local PLWHA association told Ambassador that stigmatization of people with HIV and AIDS is one of their biggest challenges. They are attempting to demonstrate to the community that it is possible to live safely alongside an infected person. Ambassador promised to emphasize this point during World Aids Day 2007.

Recovering from Tropical Storm Noel

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19. (U) The three Departments that make up the 'southern claw'- South, Nippes and Grand'Anse - were hit hard by Tropical Storm Noel in October (reftel). Standing water was still visible from the air during the flight from Port-au-Prince to Les Cayes, and Emboffs witnessed ongoing distribution of food and water purification tablets to victims in Les Cayes. Statistics on displaced persons and property damage are less than exact, but storm recovery remained the hot topic among almost all of our interlocutors. FINCA loan recipients reported a downturn in business following the storm, making loan repayment difficult. Emboffs also heard reports that the roof of the Les Cayes hospital was extensively damaged. Despite the yearly incursion of severe weather, the region's ability to prepare and recover from such storms is inadequate.

110. (SBU) Comment: Although generally safer than Port-au-Prince, Les Cayes remains a difficult place to live due to lack of basic services, high unemployment and weak local government. The GOH is chronically under-prepared to cope with tropical storms, which cause damage year after year, although donor collaboration with the GOH's Directorate of Civil Protection has made progress in disaster mitigation and early warning. Additionally, aid programs are making gradual but solid progress in improving the lives of local residents. Even local authorities admit problems with government officials' involvement in the narco-trafficking. Effectively combating these illegal activities will require close coordination and communication between the USG, GOH and MINUSTAH.

SANDERSON